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UNDER GOV. PATRICK, LAND CONSERVATION TO REACH NEW HEIGHTS

Five-year capital spending plan provides at least \$50 million per year for new urban parks, prime open spaces, and working landscapes; funding up 65 percent over previous four years. Total annual funding with other state and federal resources to exceed \$65 million.

BOSTON – Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Ian Bowles announced today that Governor Deval Patrick’s five-year capital spending plan includes at least \$50 million per year for land conservation, beginning with the current fiscal year, which began July 1.

“What we preserve is just as important as what we build,” said Governor Patrick. “We need to leave for future generations a legacy of nature, beauty, and serenity, along with a legacy of commerce and prosperity. That makes land preservation a worthy investment for the Commonwealth, now and in the future.”

The funding represents a 65 percent increase over annual land protection spending during the previous four years, and 24 percent over annual spending from 1993 to 2003, adjusted for inflation. In only one year since 1993 (\$59.9 million in 2002) did inflation-adjusted spending from the Commonwealth’s capital accounts exceed the \$50 million minimum Governor Patrick has pledged for each of the next five years.

“Governor Patrick has made an historic commitment to land conservation,” said Secretary Bowles. “This is an investment that will pay enormous dividends to the Commonwealth and its citizens for generations to come.”

Governor Patrick also identified three top priority areas for land spending in the coming years:

- *Commonwealth Urban Parks* – visionary new large urban parks in 10-15 cities located in neighborhoods with few existing parks, as well as new or expanded urban parks in all 51 of our cities over the next four years. These investments in many cases will also take

advantage of the Commonwealth's streamlined approach to cleaning up contaminated "brownfield" sites for new parks;

- *Commonwealth Habitat Reserves* – working with land trusts and with municipalities, protect at least 10 premier large, unfragmented ecosystems across the state to protect our most unique large habitats for future generations and as destination attractions to boost our emerging "green tourism" industry. These 10 landscapes include mountain tops, wilderness areas, sustainably managed forests and forest reserves, and wild rivers.
- *Commonwealth Working Landscapes* – prime agricultural and forest lands that support local, sustainable agriculture and forest industries, which together contribute over \$1 billion per year to our rural economies. Expanded funding is slated for innovative programs including the Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program, the Farm and Forest Viability Programs, the Forest Stewardship Program, and the new Working Forest Easement Program. These programs purchase land protection easements, covenants, and agreements that keep farming and forestry vibrant in our rural regions.

"With Governor Patrick's extraordinary five-year commitment, the Commonwealth has an opportunity to encourage development where communities want it, but also to provide, on a permanent basis, parks for city residents, working lands for rural industries, and large wild areas for critical habitat for future generations," said Secretary Bowles. "Never before has the Commonwealth devoted this level of funding, over a sustained period of time, to the critical goal of land preservation."

In addition to the minimum of \$50 million from the state's capital budget, Secretary Bowles expects a commitment of roughly \$7 million from the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority for land acquisitions in the Quabbin and Wachusett watersheds for the current fiscal year, up from an average of \$1.7 million per year over the last five years. Bowles serves as Chairman of the MWRA.

Land protection in the areas that feed the reservoirs with clean drinking water has saved MWRA ratepayers from a federal requirement to build a water filtration plant, at a cost of \$220 million. The current land acquisition program – a partnership of the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and MWRA – calls for the protection of 4,000 acres identified as top priority by DCR's nationally acclaimed watershed land model. Funding is derived from MWRA bond funds.

Plus, the Commonwealth garners an average of \$1.5 million per year for land protection from hunting and fishing licenses under the Land Stamp program and receives \$5 million to \$10 million from federal Department of Interior and Agriculture land programs. All together, spending by the Commonwealth on land acquisition and preservation should exceed \$65 million to \$70 million in each of the next five years.

"Mass Audubon is very excited and enthusiastic about this announcement," said Laura Johnson, president of Mass Audubon. "Governor Patrick and Secretary Bowles have made a significant commitment to land conservation in Massachusetts by authorizing this spending level for land."

"This is a great step forward – a significant increase over recent years, and a major commitment by this administration on land conservation," said Bernie McHugh, coordinator of the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition. "I look forward to working with the Governor and the Secretary to get the Commonwealth the most green for the greenbacks."

“This was the first test of Governor Patrick and Secretary Bowles on land conservation, and with this announcement, they passed with flying colors,” said Colin Novick, executive director of the Greater Worcester Land Trust. “Knowing there’s a long-term commitment from the Commonwealth to be a partner allows us in the land trust community to work on more complicated land projects. I’m very encouraged that the state is recommitting itself to land conservation.”

“The Nature Conservancy applauds Governor Patrick’s and Secretary Bowles’ leadership to protect our natural infrastructure and commitment to a robust program of bond-funded land conservation across the Commonwealth,” said Wayne Klockner, state director for The Nature Conservancy Massachusetts. “Despite inadequate investment in protecting critical lands in recent years, large wilderness areas of global significance still exist in Massachusetts and can continue to be part of our natural heritage. The Nature Conservancy supports the Patrick Administration’s plan to protect our last unfragmented landscapes as well as working woodlands, which are so essential to our state’s rural, economic and social fabric.”

“For the past few years the state hasn’t made the level of investment it needed to preserve some of our most treasured landscapes for future generations,” said Craig MacDonnell, Massachusetts State Director for The Trust for Public Land. “With the promise to commit \$50 million a year in bond funds plus additional spending from other sources, we’re seeing evidence today that Governor Patrick and Secretary Bowles have a very strong commitment to seizing the conservation opportunities we have left.”

“This is terrific news for the Berkshires and Western Massachusetts,” said Tad Ames, president of the Berkshire Natural Resources Council. “Our version of sprawl is creeping up the mountainsides and threatening quality of life and environmental health. We’re thrilled by the initiative Governor Patrick and Secretary Bowles have taken to chart a healthy future for the Massachusetts landscape.”

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